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Veterans Administration

New Projections of the Veteran Population

A Review of the Data

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NEW PROJECTIONS OF THE VETERAN POPULATION: A REVIEW OF THE DATA

Introduction

This report highlights findings from the most recent series of veteran population estimates and projections which cover the years 1980 to 2030. Projections of the size and distribution of the veteran population form an integral part of the VA's health care planning system. Given the increased pace at which the veteran population is aging relative to the U.S. population as a whole, detailed data on the national and subnational distribution of veterans by age represent a crucial component of the planning process necessary to insure adequate medical care for the increasing number of older veterans.

About every three years the Office of Information Management and Statistics develops a new series of veteran population projections, incorporating improved methodological techniques and updated data sources. The latest series of projections, completed in the spring of 1986, include national and state-level data on the number of living ex-service personnel by age, sex, and period of military service. Veteran population projections were also produced for other geographic areas such as Puerto Rico (alone or combined with the U.S. total), counties, VA medical districts, and primary service areas.

The main focus of this report encompasses a review of trends in the size and composition of the veteran population over the next 45 years. However, in order to produce projections of the veteran population (which reflect assumptions about the future), revised estimates of the veteran population for the years 1980 to 1986 were created first. These estimates were produced by adjusting the 1980 Census veteran count forward to March 1986, taking into account the three components of veteran population change--separations from the armed forces (new veterans), mortality, and interstate migration. The March 1986 veteran population totals by age, sex, and period of service were then projected into the future on the basis of assumptions regarding the relative magnitude of future components of veteran population change. These new figures supersede all previously published estimates and projections data for the years 1980 to 2030.

Total Veteran Population to Decline Steadily

The total number of veterans living in the U.S. and Puerto Rico as of March 31, 1986, was 27.8 million, a figure about 3.0 percent below the 1980 Census count of 28.6 million. The overall veteran population is projected to continue to decrease, and it will do so at an accelerating pace as the excess of veteran deaths over separations from the armed forces will grow larger over time. Whereas the annual number of veteran deaths is now about 427,000, this total will increase each year before reaching a peak of some 608,000 deaths during the year 2010. By 1990, the veteran population is expected to fall to 26.9 million, and by the turn of the century it will be down to 24.0 million.

Number of Aged Veterans to Increase Dramatically

While the total veteran population will be on a downward trend, the elderly population of ex-service personnel is projected to grow dramatically during the next 15 years. Due principally to the movement of the large cohort of World War II veterans into the oldest age categories, the population of veterans at least 65 years old is expected to increase from the 1986 total of 5.3 million to a peak of 8.9 million in 1999, an increase of 69 percent. Veterans 75 years old and over currently number 1.1 million. This group will grow to 1.5 million by 1990, and then nearly triple in size over the next 15 years, reaching a total of 4.4 million.

Further illustration of the rapid aging of the veteran population is seen in statistics on the share that veterans 65 years old and over comprise of all veterans. This proportion presently stands at 19 percent, but is expected to rise steadily over the next three decades before peaking at 46 percent by the year 2015. For the U.S. population as a whole, persons 65 and over make up 12 percent of the total. However, this share will remain constant for another 20 to 25 years before it begins to climb slowly.

Vietnam Era Veterans Largest Group in 1992, Post-Vietnam in 2009

World War II veterans are still the largest subgroup of the veteran population, numbering 10.2 million. They remain the largest sector of all veterans in spite of the fact that over 1.6 million (13.6 percent) have died since the 1980 Census was conducted six years ago. The count of World War II veterans is expected to fall to 8.9 million by 1990 and to 5.3 million by the year 2000.

Vietnam era veterans are currently the second largest sector of the veteran population. They number just under 8.3 million and constitute 30 percent of the total veteran population. The Vietnam era veteran population will remain essentially steady for the next five years before beginning to decline slowly. By 1992, they will replace World War II veterans as the largest component of the veteran population.

The only sector of the veteran population that is experiencing any noticeable gains in numbers is the post-Vietnam era group. Comprised solely of ex-service personnel whose only active-duty military service occurred since May 1975, these veterans currently total nearly 2.2 million, or 7.8 percent of the total veteran population. Post-Vietnam era veterans are projected to become the largest subgroup of veterans by the year 2009, at which time these 7.1 million veterans will make up over one-third of the total.

Sunbelt States Lose Fewest Veterans

The overall decline in the number of living veterans in the coming years will not be distributed evenly among the states. In general, the Northeast and industrial Midwest will lose the most veterans while the Sunbelt will lose the fewest veterans. In all 50 states and the District of Columbia, veteran deaths outnumber separations from the armed forces. Therefore, veteran population gains will only occur in those states experiencing noticeable in-migration. Only four states are projected to show veteran population increases between 1986 and 2000--Alaska, Arizona, Florida, and New Mexico.

California currently has the largest veteran population of any state, 2,897,000. This is followed by New York (1,902,000) and Texas (1,778,000). Five other states have veteran population totals exceeding one million--Pennsylvania

(1,550,000), Florida (1,453,000), Ohio (1,328,000), Illinois (1,287,000), and Michigan (1,048,000). Collectively, these eight largest states account for nearly half (47.9 percent) of all veterans living in the U.S.

By the turn of the century, only six states will have veteran totals of at least one million, as Illinois and Michigan will have veteran populations below this. California will still have the most veterans (2,370,000), but its total will be more than half a million lower than it is presently. Texas will replace New York in the second spot (1,708,000), with New York falling to third (1,500,000).

During the next 14 years, all states will experience marked increases in their veteran population 65 years old and over. There will be some variation in the magnitude of the anticipated growth, however. States in the Southwest and those along the southeast coast (excluding Florida, though) are expected to show the biggest increases (90 percent or more).

Methodology

Estimates and projections of the veteran population at the state and national level are prepared using a cohort-component method. This procedure adjusts the initial population of a given year on the basis of age and sex-specific estimates of separations, deaths, and migrants to obtain an estimate of the veteran population a year later. Information on armed forces separations is supplied by the Department of Defense (DoD). Actual DoD-reported separations data, adjusted for reenlistments, were used to produce population estimates from 1980 to 1986. Projections of separations from the armed forces were set at 240,000 per year, reflecting an assumption of constant military strength with no future armed conflict through the next half century. The distribution of separations by period of service was adjusted over the 45-year projection period to reflect an increasing number of post-Vietnam era separatees and a declining number of separatees who served during the Vietnam era.

As veteran-specific mortality data do not exist, the new series of estimates and projections incorporate survival rates for nonblacks (or whites) to estimate the mortality experience of veterans. There is some evidence that veterans experi-

ence lower mortality than nonveterans; this is reflected in the use of nonblack survival rates which are somewhat higher than those of the total population. Survival rates for the years 1980 to 2030 were derived through interpolation using two sets of single-year-of-age life tables: (a) 1979-81 life tables based on the 1980 Census for white males and white females, published by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) and; (b) projected life tables for the years 2005 and 2080 for nonblack males and nonblack females developed jointly by the Social Security Administration and the Bureau of the Census. These survival rates reflect an assumption of slow but steady improvement in survival over time.

The magnitude (and direction) of veteran interstate migration between 1980 and 1985 was derived indirectly from census estimates of civilian net migration adjusted for the ratio of age and state-specific veteran-to-civilian migration. These ratios were calculated on the basis of the relationship between veteran and civilian migration patterns from 1975 to 1980 as determined by the 1980 Census question on residence five years ago. For several states, the calculation of 1980-85 migration rates resulted in a turnaround in the direction of net migration when compared with the 1975-80 pattern. Alaska and North Carolina, for example, showed a net gain of migrants between 1980 and 1985 (rather than a loss), while Alabama, Oregon, Mississippi, and West Virginia showed a net loss rather than a net gain during the first half of the 1980's. The 1980-85 age and state-specific net veteran migration rates were tapered gradually to approximate the number of interstate migrants for the projection years, 1986 to 2030.

THE AGING VETERAN POPULATION

1980 – 2030

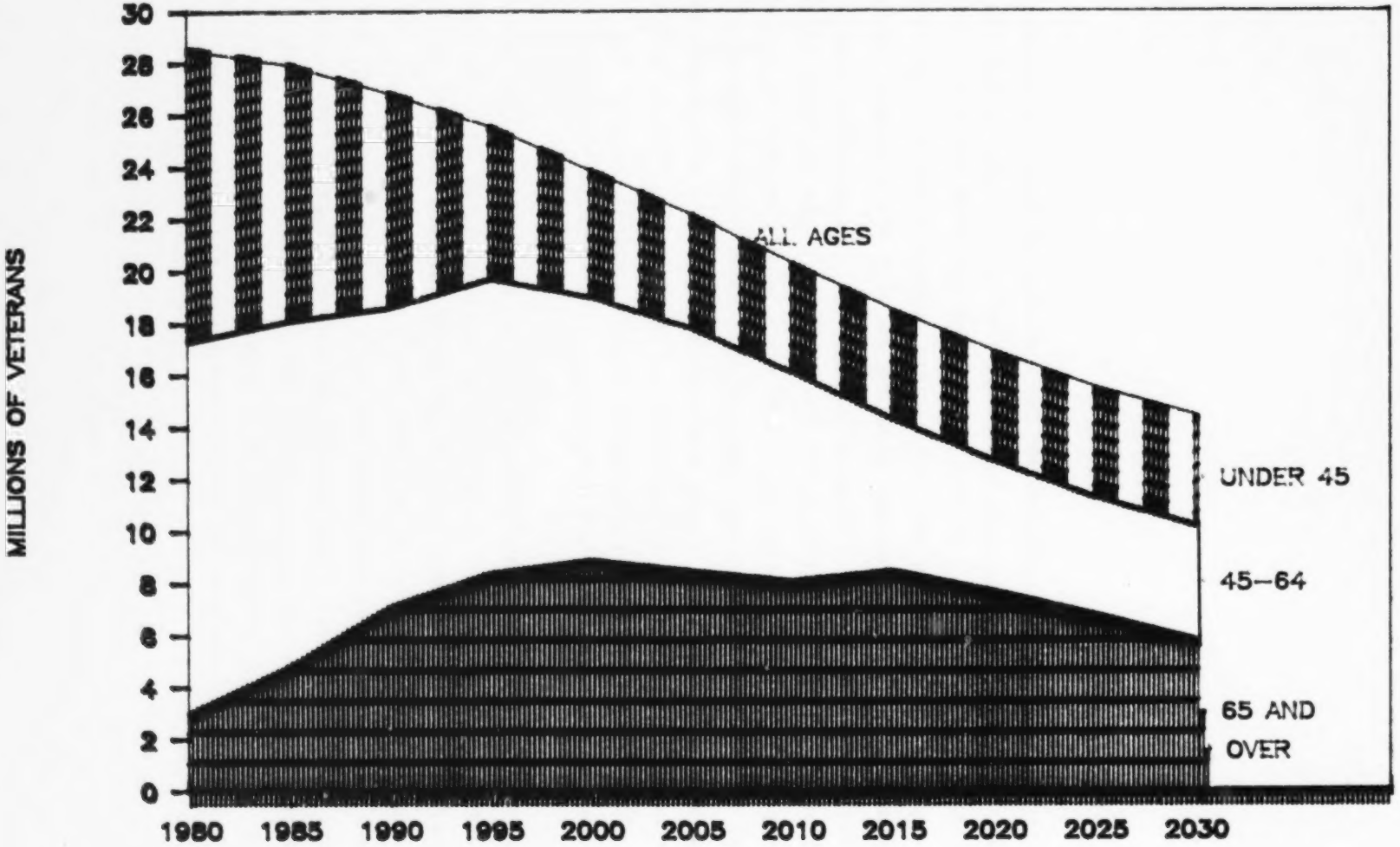

Table 1. Estimates and Projections of the Veteran Population for Selected Ages and Periods of Service, 1980-2030

(in thousands)

Year	Total veteran population	Veterans 65 years and over	Veterans 75 years and over	World War II veterans	Vietnam era veterans	Post-Vietnam era veterans
1980 Census	28,640	3,036	859	11,841	8,073	989
Estimates						
1981	28,603	3,295	858	11,600	8,138	1,238
1982	28,470	3,589	878	11,348	8,178	1,426
1983	28,305	3,928	913	11,085	8,205	1,604
1984	28,145	4,333	957	10,811	8,228	1,799
1985	27,960	4,772	1,010	10,526	8,244	1,984
1986	27,777	5,253	1,073	10,230	8,260	2,180
Projections						
1987	27,579	5,752	1,146	9,923	8,268	2,379
1988	27,369	6,211	1,232	9,607	8,271	2,580
1989	27,148	6,642	1,337	9,281	8,271	2,782
1990	26,914	7,050	1,464	8,946	8,268	2,984
1991	26,668	7,421	1,627	8,602	8,262	3,186
1992	26,411	7,764	1,809	8,252	8,252	3,388
1993	26,141	8,049	2,016	7,894	8,240	3,591
1994	25,859	8,224	2,264	7,532	8,223	3,793
1995	25,567	8,400	2,528	7,165	8,202	3,997
1996	25,263	8,570	2,813	6,796	8,164	4,212
1997	24,949	8,697	3,106	6,425	8,119	4,431
1998	24,625	8,818	3,364	6,054	8,066	4,652
1999	24,292	8,878	3,598	5,684	8,007	4,875
2000	23,951	8,871	3,807	5,317	7,942	5,098
2005	22,163	8,456	4,350	3,575	7,526	6,219
2010	20,316	8,086	4,339	2,100	6,946	7,322
2015	18,523	8,482	3,859	1,037	6,175	8,369
2020	16,917	7,686	3,628	425	5,216	9,334
2025	15,558	6,824	4,044	146	4,114	10,187
2030	14,440	5,816	3,587	48	2,954	10,897

Note: All data are as of March 31 and include veterans living in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Table 2. Estimates and Projections of the Veteran Population by State, Total and Ages 65 and Over for 1986, 1990, and 2000

(in thousands)

State	Total veteran population			Veterans aged 65 years and over		
	1986	1990	2000	1986	1990	2000
Total	27,652	26,789	23,830	5,235	7,024	8,829
Alabama	411	398	358	77	103	134
Alaska	68	76	82	6	11	21
Arizona	400	417	407	83	119	163
Arkansas	267	267	250	56	73	91
California	2,897	2,758	2,370	552	734	928
Colorado	400	394	362	59	82	113
Connecticut	401	379	320	80	106	129
Delaware	78	77	70	14	20	25
Dist. of Col.	60	55	46	14	16	18
Florida	1,453	1,511	1,462	374	518	668
Georgia	648	656	635	104	145	200
Hawaii	102	101	96	16	24	36
Idaho	117	115	106	20	27	35
Illinois	1,287	1,197	993	242	315	372
Indiana	658	626	553	110	144	177
Iowa	342	324	280	62	78	95
Kansas	291	278	240	56	74	91
Kentucky	376	354	303	69	90	108
Louisiana	438	424	379	79	107	135
Maine	154	153	144	29	39	51
Maryland	537	516	454	95	130	166
Massachusetts	699	661	558	149	197	232
Michigan	1,048	976	832	170	221	259
Minnesota	504	479	413	86	110	138
Mississippi	236	230	207	48	64	80
Missouri	639	622	560	121	160	203
Montana	107	105	95	18	24	31
Nebraska	189	182	160	33	44	59
Nevada	136	138	130	23	33	49
New Hampshire	140	142	136	24	33	45
New Jersey	904	857	719	189	255	307
New Mexico	170	175	171	30	43	60
New York	1,902	1,784	1,500	404	519	599
North Carolina	679	686	652	126	184	256
North Dakota	73	72	67	12	15	21
Ohio	1,328	1,252	1,076	240	318	377
Oklahoma	402	399	363	73	99	129
Oregon	358	336	287	65	84	98
Pennsylvania	1,550	1,476	1,263	318	427	505
Rhode Island	122	116	98	27	35	41
South Carolina	351	352	334	63	89	122
South Dakota	79	77	70	14	19	25
Tennessee	528	517	471	96	128	164
Texas	1,778	1,798	1,708	304	418	562
Utah	155	152	137	26	37	49
Vermont	64	63	59	11	15	19
Virginia	672	663	612	118	165	224
Washington	597	580	520	100	135	176
West Virginia	229	216	186	46	60	71
Wisconsin	570	552	488	96	128	160
Wyoming	60	57	50	9	11	15

Note: All data are as of March 31 and include veterans living in the U.S. only. Detail may not add to total shown due to rounding.

For further information concerning veteran population statistics contact the author, Lynne R. Heltman, at:

Veterans Administration
Office of Information Management
and Statistics (711)
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Telephone: (202) 389-2204